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DESIGNS IN SUMBA TEXTILES, LOCAL MEANINGS AND FOREIGN INFLUENCES

Monni Adams

The Sumba woman, when asked why she uses the fanciful designs in the textile she is decorating, will simply reply, "To make it beautiful." I heard this response repeatedly—as did Jasper, the specialist on Indonesian handcrafts almost sixty years ago (1912:322)—when in 1969 I visited the villages of the textile district on the east coast of Sumba, a small island east of Bali.

The best-known decorated textiles of Sumba are large rectangular cotton cloths dyed in saturated tones of rust and blue with many designs appearing as pale figures on the dark ground (Fig. 1). The images are reserved from the dyes by the *ikat* or 'binding technique' widely practiced in Indonesia. These richly colored mantles are worn by men only on ceremonial occasions, as wrap-around garments, one around the hips and the other over the shoulder.

Although the decorating technique has long been understood (Jasper, 1912; Buhler, 1942), questions persist about the handsome cloths, because the designs and their arrangement are exceptional in the textile arts of Indonesia. Textiles of other Indonesian islands employ designs which we usually call ornamental, that is, small schematic forms. If organic figures appear, they are obscured by ornamentation. Composition is relatively simple, consisting of continuous repeats of one or two design units, relieved by border patterns. In contrast, Sumba textiles boldly present a variety of large organic figures in a composition which is both pleasing and complex.

On a typical East Sumba wrap, as in Fig. 1, the surface is entirely covered with figures which appear in horizontal bands of alternate rust and dark blue colors. In each row, the motif changes except that, frequently, the narrow first and third rows from the ends are identical, thus creating a border effect for the important second band. The large figures in this wide band give the cloth its name, such as, in Fig. 1, 'lion wrap' *hinggi mahangu*. The border bands represent horses, the fourth row, dogs, and across the center there is a schematic floral pattern *wala ai*. One of the unvarying features of the men's mantle is that the upper bands, although oriented in the opposite direction, are identical in design and color sequence to the lower half of the cloth.

The major figures within the bands are large and light in color, while some smaller images appear in medium blue and rust tones. Large and small figures together form clusters which are repeated as design units across the bands. For example, in the second row of Fig. 1, the major design unit consists of two lions confronting a plant on a base. In this unit, smaller lion figures stand on the large animal's back, between its legs and over its tail. In Fig. 2 the skull tree is flanked at its base and upper reaches by pairs of birds, and the river shrimp placed between each tree can be viewed as another flanking motif.

The overall impression (see Figs. 3 and 4) is of a busy surface filled with light-colored figures. In pose the figures are static, but the many alterations in outline, the erect stance of the figures, the upright heads and tails of the animals and the alert facial details yield an impression of

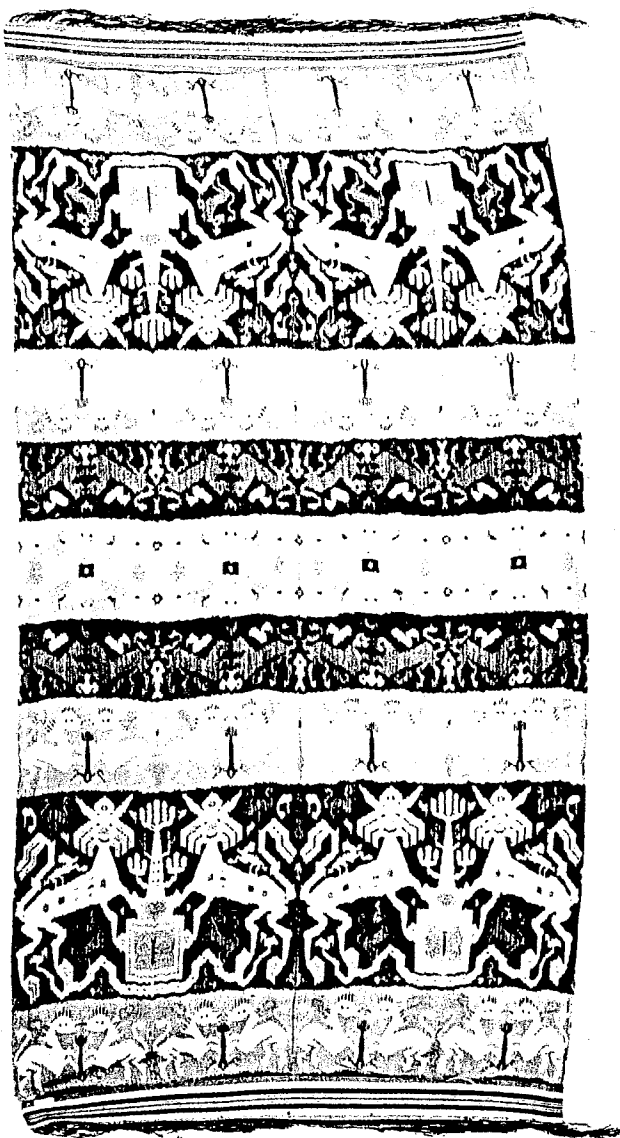


Fig. 1 Men's cotton mantle, rampant lions motif, East Sumba, Indonesia. Composed of two identical panels, the cloth is decorated in alternate bands of rust and dark blue by warp ikat technique. Slight blurring of outline is characteristic effect of this technique. In typical compositions, as here, figures in horizontal rows are oriented in opposite directions from the center of the cloth. Width: 1.27 m; length: 2.84 m. T.M. 6.271.



Fig. 2 Men's cotton mantle, skull tree motif, East Sumba. Reserve dyed in rust and dark blue by warp ikat technique. Ikat is a form of tie-and-dye in which the designs are obtained on the yarn strands before weaving. On Sumba and eastern islands of Indonesia, designs are dyed only on the warp, as the weft does not show on the surface. The horses in the lowest row were covered with protective bindings in the usual way but the upper row of horses was left unbound, thus absorbing the dye so that the horses appear 'in the negative.' Width: 1.07 m; length: 2.67 m. T.M. 6.270.

movement and liveliness. The character of the forms is essentially linear. The limbs of the bodies are represented as slender, delicate, usually curving forms emanating from a compact core. Every surface is variegated, broken into small areas by changes of color or form. Large masses are relieved by interior markings, such as the ribs and internal organs on the human figures and the 'lifelines' on the deer. The rich color, the balanced repetitions and the vitality of expression combine to form a harmonious and interesting decoration. In such examples, the Sumba craftswoman achieves her simply stated aim.

The Sumbanese see more than beauty in the cloths. Decorated textiles are objects of wealth. To produce them requires sustained and arduous effort to collect and employ the essential materials: cotton whether home-grown or imported and various plant dyes obtained on the island. Skilled and talented craftswomen must be spared from daily routines and supported over long periods of time. Because of the seasonal and intermittent nature of the textile work, two and a half years may elapse before finished cloths are produced.

Although women of all classes are involved in the work, only the high social class or royalty can afford to produce textiles in quantity. In each of the several districts of East Sumba, the royal families congregate in the villages, one of which serves as a district capital, while the rest of the population occupy small hamlets near their fields of corn and guard the grazing lands for buffalo and horses belonging to the nobility. Specialized textile work, such as decorating and dyeing is concentrated in the villages, but weaving of the cloths, a widely known skill, may be done by the women of the hamlets. In the traditional culture, the power to command resources and labor was translated as a right. Producing and disposing of decorated textiles was a prerogative of royal households.

Today the districts are part of the administrative system of the Republic of Indonesia. The nobility do not automatically hold governing posts, but they continue as the major economic and cultural force in the lives of the people. In the capital villages, the noblewomen and their servants still make the finest textiles. They continue to favor the old designs which, broadly speaking, retain their traditional meaning.

For everyone in the community, the designs in these colorful luxury cloths are symbols of royal prestige. This is their broadest, most inclusive meaning, the most commonly heard reference made by persons of all classes in identifying the designs. Persons viewing the large deer with its great candelabra antlers, (as in Figs. 3 or 4) will comment, "That's a 'royal deer' *Ruha marambaja*," placing this deer in a class of royal objects. They are not thinking specifically at that moment that traditionally only noblemen could organize a deer hunt as part of the sacred rites of the dry season nor that large upstanding headdresses were exclusive to royalty in Sumba. They are expressing an equation in their minds between the character of the forms and of royalty.

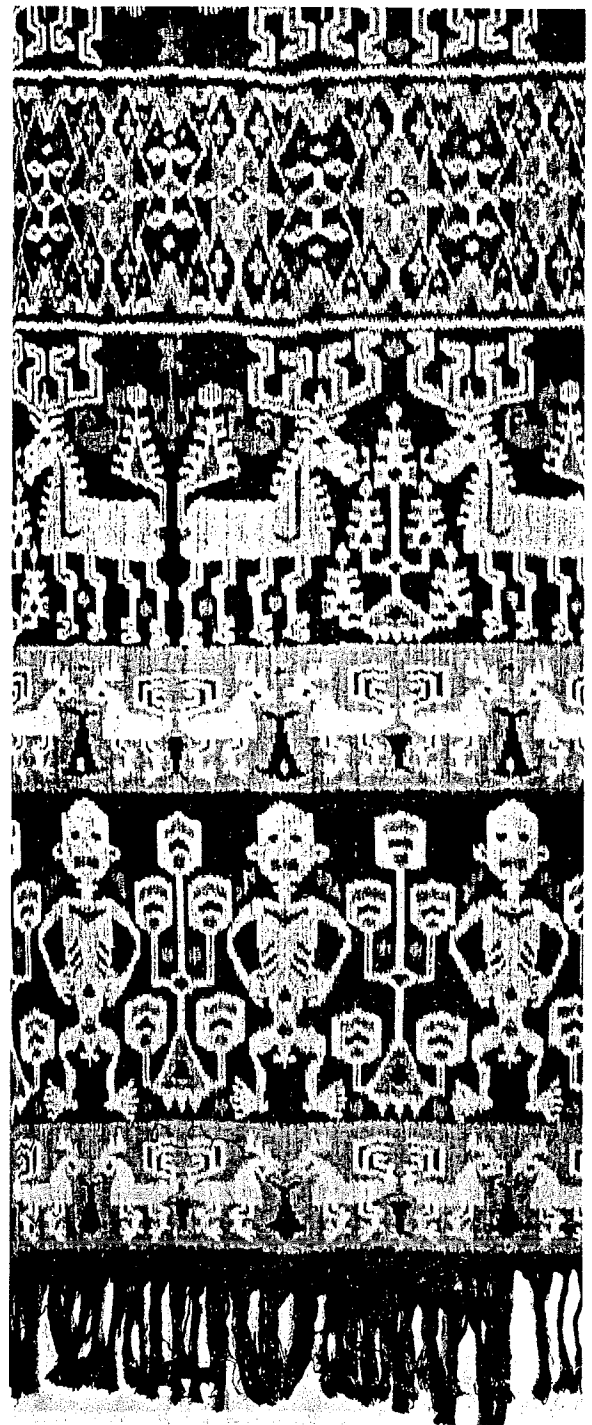


Fig. 3 Detail, men's cotton mantle, warp ikat technique, East Sumba. Reading up from fringe, the figures are roosters, human figure alternating with abstract plant, roosters, deer confronting a blossoming plant and, in the centerfield, the *patola ratu* pattern. Entire mantle, width: 1.42 m; length: 2.89 m. Detail, width: .71 m; length: 1.45 m. T.M. 6.267.

To understand this equation, one must take into account the significance of the royal class beyond their secular role. The ruler who stands at the apex of the aristocracy is not simply the wealthiest man in the district. He is considered the direct heir of a great Deity who, with his servants and noble companions, descended from the heavens to the island of Sumba, bringing with him the complex and rigid rules by which the society is ordered. Social classes, food production or the mystical events of afterlife, all are regulated by ritual procedures established at that beginning by the ruler's supernatural Ancestor. People still regard the traditional ruler with awe and fear as a mortal possessed of super-human powers. By a kind of analogic the Sumbanese translate special qualities of phenomena such as large size, unusual features or high degree of complexity as signs of

the 'supra-ordinary powers of royalty' *maramba* and the 'ruler' *na maramba* at its summit.

Large horse figures (as in Fig. 4) will be referred to as *ndjara maramba* 'royal horses' meaning the extra-fine ones which are put in the service of the king who formally owns all the livestock in his district. In the same way, the human figures (as in Fig. 3) which are first identified as humans are then said to represent 'servants' *ata*, because the king is characterized by his dominion over many servants and because all persons in the district will claim to be 'servants' of the king.

In view of the way in which the people revere the traditional ruler the link expressed between royalty and depictions of crocodiles and pythons which are the most feared predators on the island is at first puzzling. On one occasion

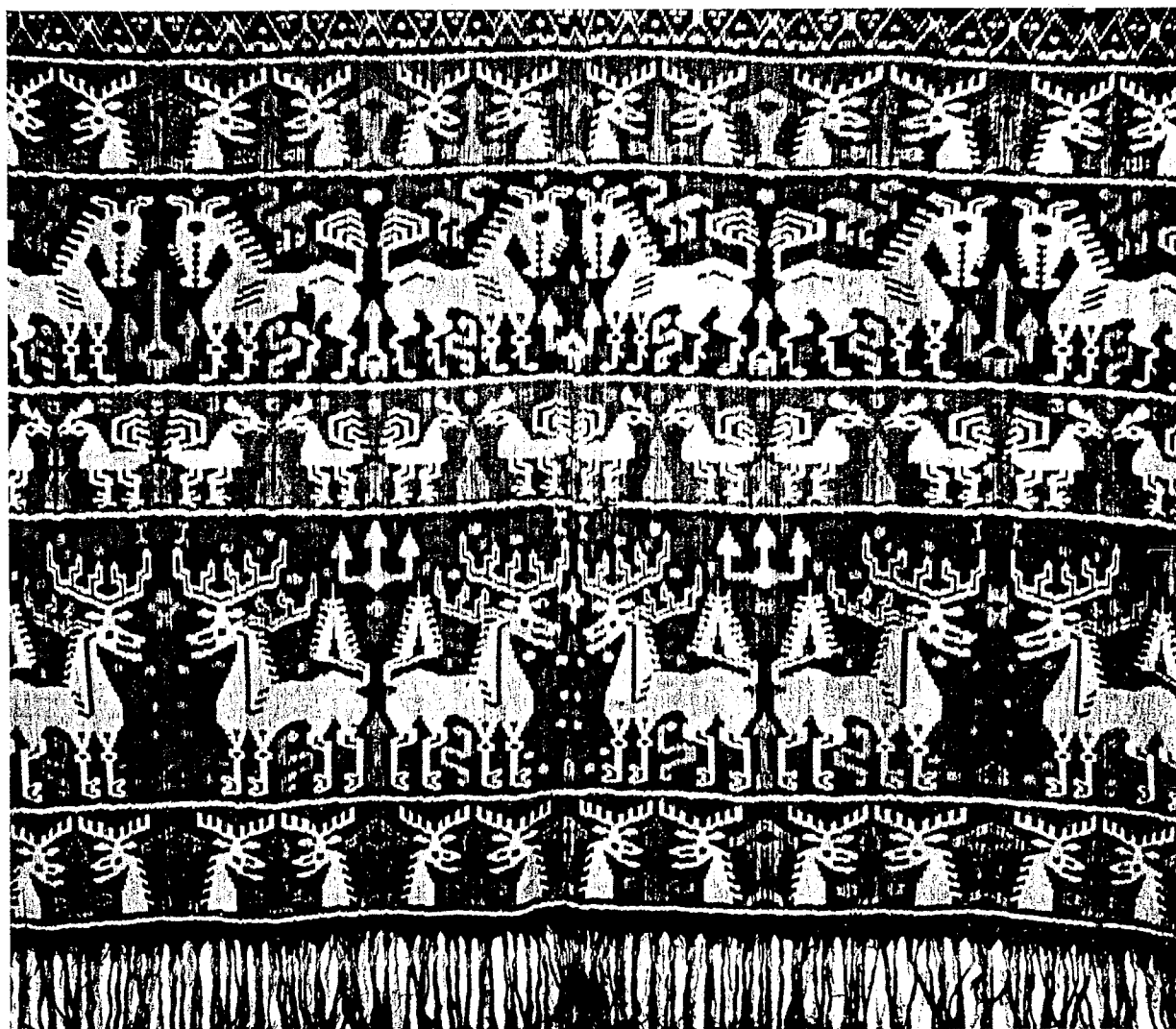


Fig. 4 Men's cotton mantle, detail showing lower half only, warp ikat technique, East Sumba. Appearing in confronting pairs, motifs are deer's heads, deer, roosters, horses, deer's heads and, in the center, *patola ratu*. Width: 1.68 m; length: 2.88 m. T.M. 1962.1.6.

several Sumbanese and I were gathered around a weaver at work on a cloth displaying a design of a very large, twisted crocodile in the act of seizing a tiny human figure. After the designer had identified all the elements of the scene in a matter-of-fact way, I pressed her for explanations.

One of the old men leaned forward and said, "The 'king' *Na maramba*," nodding in the direction of the royal village. The others, not having dared to express it, agreed. This was said not resentfully but respectfully, for the king, rightfully, in their minds, has the power to punish, like the crocodile who, they believe, seizes a guilty man as he crosses a river. Other major designs, such as the cockatoo with its beautiful crest and swift, destructive beak and the great sea shrimp who is believed, in changing its shell, to renew its life, serve also as analogies of royal powers. For the majority of designs, one must seek out the opinions and expressed beliefs of the Sumbanese concerning which aspect or quality enables each figure to serve as a metaphor for royalty.

In other cases, it is the actions of the Sumbanese which clearly link designs with royalty, for certain designs represent scenes from royal ritual. The most important rites take the form of festivals on a grand scale requiring hundreds of guests, large supplies of food and exchanges of luxury goods. Their scale alone requires they be sponsored by royalty. These major rituals, which are distinguished by special terms (*li/li*), encompass royal marriage, royal burial (voyage to the afterlife), renewal of growth, royal raiding and building the royal temple. Performance is considered essential in order to renew all life and to maintain the order of the universe as it is conceived by the Sumbanese.

Significant aspects of these rites can be identified on the cloths. For example, in Fig. 2, the skull tree design is recognizable as the wooden structure which, after a victorious raid, was the focus of a great religious celebration during which the heads of captured enemies were hung on its branches. Prior to Dutch administration, such a skull tree stood in each royal village. For a community no longer threatened by an enemy, the skull tree was an augur of a prosperous future and an evidence of the royal leader's power. In other textiles, scenes suggest the final act of temple consecration when a sculpture is placed on the peak of the roof, or the royal funeral during which a rider in trance represents the spirit of the dead on its journey to the afterworld.

Finally, some designs are specifically singled out by the Sumbanese as *tanda maramba* 'signs of royalty'. The basis for this association is clear to us in one outstanding case—the rampant lion design as shown in Fig. 1. These heraldic lions resemble the coat of arms of the former Dutch government which first administered the island of Sumba in the early 20th century. After the Dutch forces put an end to the armed rivalry among Sumba royalty, they supported the authority of the local rulers. The East Sumba nobility, identifying themselves closely with the distant Queen, treasured the official agreements, medallions and

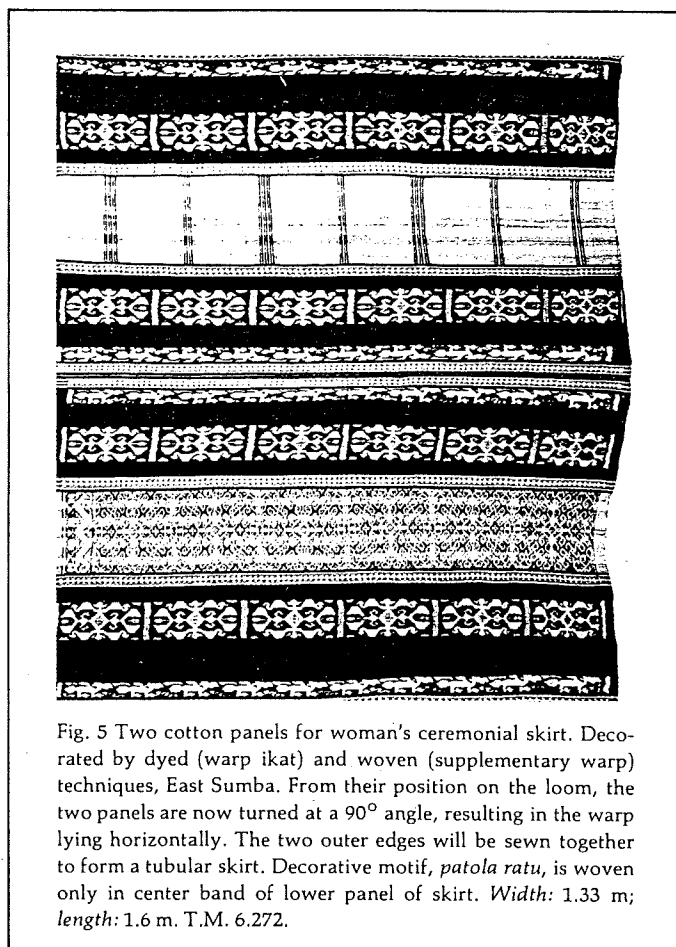


Fig. 5 Two cotton panels for woman's ceremonial skirt. Decorated by dyed (warp ikat) and woven (supplementary warp) techniques, East Sumba. From their position on the loom, the two panels are now turned at a 90° angle, resulting in the warp lying horizontally. The two outer edges will be sewn together to form a tubular skirt. Decorative motif, *patola ratu*, is woven only in center band of lower panel of skirt. Width: 1.33 m; length: 1.6 m. T.M. 6.272.

coins of the Dutch government, all of which were decorated with versions of the heraldic lions. In this way the Dutch royal symbol became significant for the Sumbanese royalty as a mark of their own status. In borrowing the motif, however, the Sumbanese modify the forms so that the lions lose their savage expression, and the rectangular European shield is transformed into a base for a blossoming plant.

In the centerfield, certain patterns also are identified as 'signs.' The most admired and complex of these is the *patola ratu* design, shown in the Textile Museum mantle of Fig. 3.¹ The Sumbanese link this with a design of the same name which appears in the ceremonial skirts of royal women (Fig. 5). Both designs are said to derive from the dappled lozenges of the python's skin.

Craftswomen use the supplementary weft technique in weaving the design into these skirts. Because of the careful and complex counting procedures preserved in pattern models (Fig. 6) which are involved in the rendering of motifs in this weaving technique, these motifs are necessarily conservative. The models, made of reeds and string, are kept carefully guarded in royal houses, and knowledge of the technique is limited to a few noblewomen and their

¹In addition to the *patola ratu*, the most frequently mentioned designs are the *habaku*, *karihu* and *mata taki*. For illustrations see Adams, *Needle and Bobbin Bulletin*, 1972 (in press).

assistants. Only the rare craftswoman can create such pattern models so that copies are carefully made before the old ones disintegrate. When a noblewoman dies, her models are distributed among her royal kinsmen. Such pattern models do provide inspiration for ikatting designs. In the case of the ikatted *patola ratu* it seems likely that, based on the close resemblance of the central motifs and their pattern of alternation, the woven pattern served as the source of inspiration.

However, the name and the style of this design show the influence of the Indian silk sari called (in India) *patola*. *Patola* cloths (Fig. 7) have long been imported into the western part of Indonesia as favored elements of elite costume. On Sumba, as on other islands of eastern Indonesia, these expensive silks are required as ceremonial cloths in royal ritual; they are regarded as "super" possessions, characteristic and essential to the high royalty with whom the cloths are so closely identified that their name, *hunda rangga ru patola*, serves as the formal term of reference for important nobles. Stylistic influence of *patola* on the ikatted design shows in the use of fine lines made up of dashes, acute angles and patches of changing ground color.

Formerly, under threat of death, no person not of high royal standing would dare to appear with such royal 'signs' on his mantle, unless the cloth had been awarded to him by royalty. Under Dutch civil government, however, the local rulers lost their power to enforce prohibitions relating to dress and to punish violations of class rules. In the '20s and '30s, restricted designs became widely popular in East Sumba, especially the *patola ratu* which was appreciated by both Sumbanese and Dutch admirers as a show of tie-dyeing skill. At present, two generations later, the Sumbanese still proudly point out the 'restricted' nature of these royal designs.

Discussions with the Sumbanese and stories that are told about violations in the past of rules of dress suggest that the gradual spreading of restricted designs is an old and

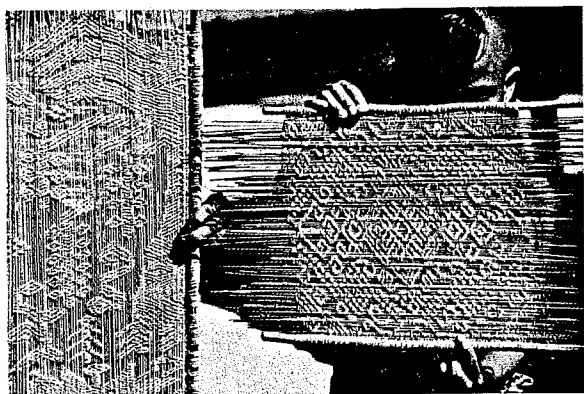


Fig. 6 Pattern model for supplementary warp weaving, East Sumba. The schematic design is executed with reeds as weft and cotton string as warp. On the loom, the weaver inserts similar reeds into warp strands in order to guide the weaving of designs in royal women's skirts. Field photograph, Melolo district, 1968, M. Adams.

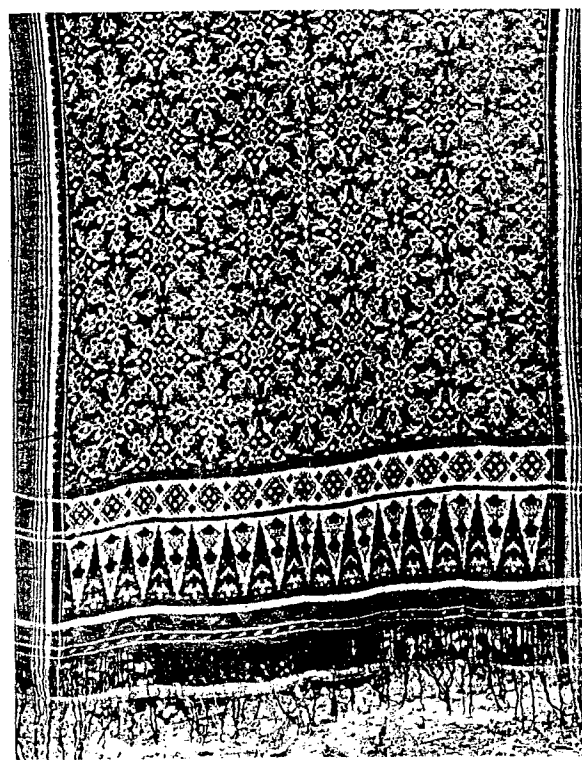


Fig. 7 A detail of a wine-colored silk *patola* cloth from India, owned on Sumba. Decorated by rare double-ikat technique in which both warp and weft strands are dyed with designs and then matched during weaving. Typical of the smaller 'export' versions of the wedding sari of Gujarat in western India, this *patola* cloth is part of the treasure of a royal household in East Sumba. This and other imported cloths, considered essential features of royal ritual, have influenced Sumba textile design. Width: 1.5 m; length: 2 m. Field photograph, Capital village of Parai Jawangu, Rende district, 1968, M. Adams.

continuous process. Prohibitions were more effective within the royal capital area than in outlying centers, and, as the Sumbanese are well aware, lesser-ranked persons are eager to adopt the 'signs' of royalty as claims to status. This process of transmission of designs may be viewed as a funnel. At the narrow end, opposed to those eager to adopt signs of higher status, is the introduction of new designs by royalty through their exclusive links with prestigious imported wealth. Long before the establishment of Dutch administration, traders from other islands, from Australia, from colonial Asian centers and from China came directly to Sumba. Controlling this foreign trade, which brought essentially luxury objects, was a prerogative of the royal class.

One of the important items in this trade was Chinese porcelain and, eventually, European imitations of it. On Sumba these were used for sacred meals and were stored

as royal treasure. Craftswomen point to these valued plates, along with the Indian silks, as sources of inspiration for textile designs, and we can see this influence in certain forms, such as elaborated dragons or shrimp figures viewed in profile.²

The few designs we are able to identify as borrowed show that within the traditional society the adoption of foreign motifs is not random or arbitrary. The foreign images are meaningful as symbols of and for Sumbanese royalty, and this broad context serves as a threshold for borrowing.

Within this context, selectivity in borrowing is a complex matter. The textiles, ceramics and European insignia which came to Sumba were also brought to other islands of eastern Indonesia and regarded as royal treasure. However, each island has its own distinctive style of textile design with traces of foreign influence.³ Within Sumba, the effect (that we recognize) of *patola* cloths varies considerably. On the western tip of the island, the only type of mantle that is ikatted follows a standard patterning (Fig. 8) which shows the *patola* influence in the composition, specifically in the use of a large centerfield and horizontal banding at the upper and lower ends. (See Buhler, 1959, for discussion of this influence). However, the large motif repeated in the lower horizontal rows represents a distinctively Sumbanese ornament (Fig. 9) worn as an earring and used as bride-price and wealth. The *patola* influence is prominent in the designs of certain East Sumba mantles, such as one from the capital village of Rende (Fig. 10). The border rows and the centerfield designs are larger, simpler versions of those in a *patola* cloth belonging to the Rende women (Fig. 7), but the ikatted mantle retains the broad banding and distinctive, local figurative style. The long-term retention of borrowed designs probably rests on their appropriateness in relation to the esoteric sphere of religion which incorporates the Sumbanese world view.

As sacred offerings and as costume, the decorated textiles are an integral part of ritual life. Religious ritual on

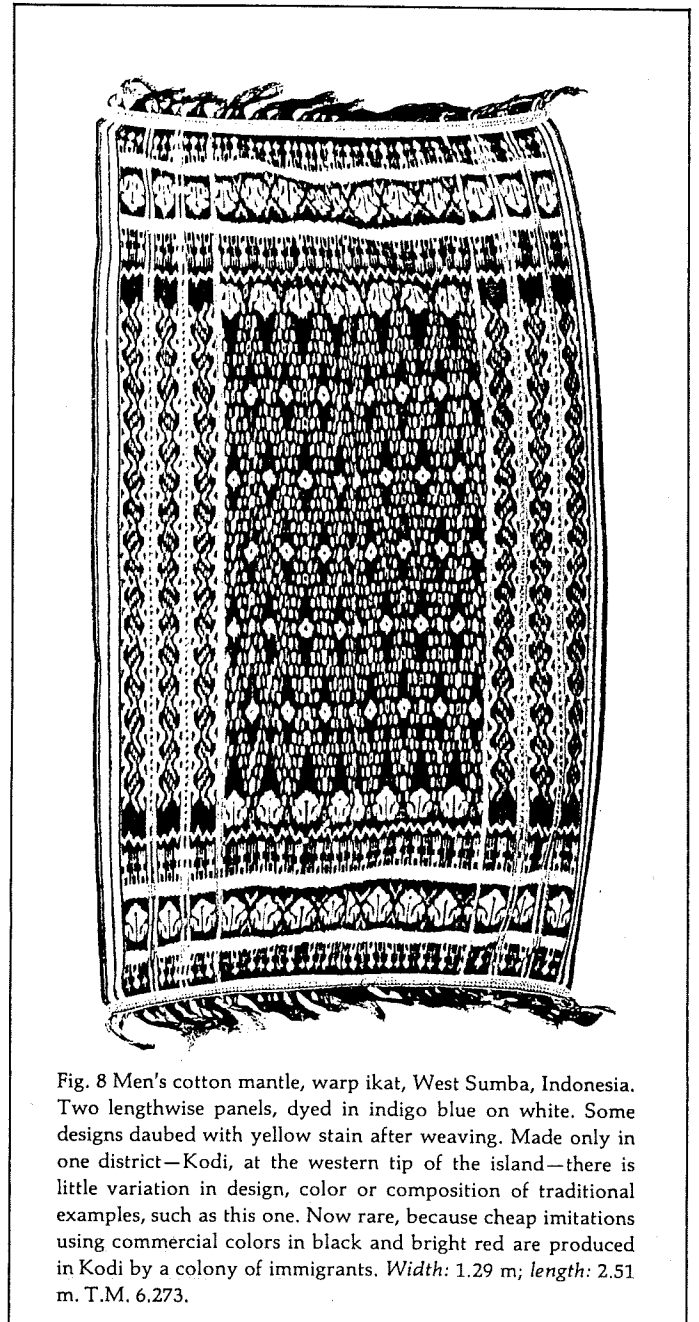


Fig. 8 Men's cotton mantle, warp ikat, West Sumba, Indonesia. Two lengthwise panels, dyed in indigo blue on white. Some designs daubed with yellow stain after weaving. Made only in one district—Kodi, at the western tip of the island—there is little variation in design, color or composition of traditional examples, such as this one. Now rare, because cheap imitations using commercial colors in black and bright red are produced in Kodi by a colony of immigrants. Width: 1.29 m; length: 2.51 m. T.M. 6.273.

²These prestigious foreign imports, that is, porcelains, textiles and European insignia (such as flags, coins, etc.), have a long history in Indonesia. They appear importantly in written European records of the 16th and 17th centuries. The early aim of Dutch shipping in Indonesia was to take over the inter-insular trade from the Chinese and other Asian carriers. Monopoly agreements made "at the shoreline" with Sumbanese rulers from the mid-18th century onward, however, were not enforced by either party. The establishment of a trading post, primarily for the purchase of horses, at the main harbor of East Sumba in the mid-19th century brought about limited contacts between the Sumbanese people and Dutch military and civil officers. Some forms of rampant lion designs probably date from these early official contacts.

³A striking example of selectivity of interest occurred on Sumba in connection with one of the sacred porcelain plates, an example of the famous "willow" pattern, which shows a complex scene of Chinese buildings, costumes and a bridge over a stream. In explaining why the plate served as the most sacred serving dish for the Ancestor Deities of the community, an Elder traced over the narrow jagged lines of a fence in the lower right section of the plate, saying, "There, the eight stages of the journey (from the Upperworld) of the Ancestor Deities," and completely ignored the rest of the designs.

Sumba, although characteristically public, revolves around an intensely secretive core of belief, its innermost mysteries are formulated in esoteric lore involving precious, carefully wrapped and hidden treasures of gold ornaments.⁴ While everyone learns how to perform in a ceremony and knows its broad purpose, common terms for important aspects of the rites are euphemisms and explication of elements or overall design is considered beyond the proper ken of ordinary man. This kind of knowledge is guarded as official

⁴In an effort to account for the generic term used to refer to the 'Ancestor Deities' the *Marapu*, a Sumbanese (who had attended school in the harbor town) said it derived from the phrase, *ma rapu* 'that which is hidden extremely well.' This, at least, provides an excellent description of secretive Sumbanese attitudes toward religious beliefs.



Fig. 9 West Sumba woman wearing traditional ear ornament, *mamuli*. The *mamuli*, rarely shown in East Sumba cloths, is the principal motif in West Sumba ikatted mantles. (Cf. Fig. 8). In gold, silver or tin, it is an essential part of the brideprice. In return, the bride's family will give textiles to the groom. Field photograph, Kodi district, 1949, Alfred Bühler, Museum of Ethnology, Basel.



Fig. 10 Men's cotton mantle, rampant lions motif, warp ikat, East Sumba. Detail shows full centerfield and lower half of cloth, at slightly less than full width. Borders and centerfield patterning imitates imported Indian silk *patola* cloths (cf. Fig. 7); major motif, lion rampant at shield, adapted from Dutch coat of arms. Striped band above fringe helps prevent fraying. Width: 1.43 m; length: 2.44 m. Field photograph, Parai Jawangu village, Rende district, 1968, M. Adams.

secret lore of the intellectuals, that is, the priests and spokesmen who manage the rites, and it is embodied in their language, the chants, prayers and stories associated with performance of those rites. In this material and in the exegesis of it by knowledgeable men, there are no explicit explanations of and few references to textile designs. Thus, beyond the broad and openly affirmed meaning as symbols of royalty, further interpretation must rely on penetrating that language of ritual to see how the designs may fit into the schema of religious thought, a special analysis that goes beyond the scope of this article.

However, in the textiles, we have visual evidence of the mind of the makers. There seems to be an implicit statement of meaning in the arrangement of subject matter, especially in the relationships among major motifs which are organized according to referential meanings of an abstract character. The variety of combinations seems to reflect a kind of mental play based on these abstract meanings or themes.

To begin with one of the simpler arrangements, (Fig. 2) the theme of abundance is common to the large figurative design, that is, the realistic skull tree, and the central schematic motif, which is called *kaba kara*. This phrase is part of a ritual term that, in discussions, is invariably completed with its parallel, thus, *kaba kara* 'golden turtle-shell' *wuja rara* 'red (—toned) crocodile.' This pair of metaphors forms one of the favored formal terms of reference for the king. For the Sumbanese, both the sea turtle, known for its prolific broods, and the skull tree stand for exceptional fertility. The latter link may seem strange to the outsider, but the warrior raids were socially approved, ritually sanctified means of acquiring wealth in the form of looted treasure, food stores and human booty, above and beyond the community's own productive capacity. In one of the widely known sacred harvest myths, the hero must descend through the branches of the skull tree, collecting golden treasure and fine horses at each level, before he obtains his heavenly bride and with that, all-encompassing power and success.

In another textile (Fig. 3) designs are juxtaposed which point up the contrast of life- and death-approaches to the search for abundance. The deer (formerly plentiful on Sumba) enjoying a leafy plant belongs to the sphere of powerful natural growth while the contained forms of the abstract skull tree and the actively posed but skeletal man show subtle acknowledgement of death-linked means of achievement.

Contrast is evident in the major motifs of the mantle in Fig. 4, which presents two quite similar grazing animals, the deer and the horse. To the Sumbanese, who are sensitive to habitats, the two animals represent distinctive spheres: the deer, a wild creature of the woodlands whose pursuit is in itself a sacred rite, and the mundane horse of the grasslands, constantly under the hand of man. This contrast appears in the form of the tamely posed horse opposed to the deer with florid antlers, shown at once in frontal and profile views, and its 'magical' lifeline.

Another kind of relationship, domination and subordi-

nation, is suggested by the designs of Fig. 1. The royal lions dominate the wide band and the distinctly subdued, alternate subject-band shows small figures—muted in blue—of dogs, which on Sumbā signify warriors. The king's raiding party, referred to as the "dogs of the Deities," ritually imitated the behaviour of hunting dogs.

Integration in relation to a single value is apparent in the designs of Fig. 10 which all share a common inspiration in foreign sources. Patterns from the precious *patola* cloths border the royal insignia from the Dutch coat of arms. Even the large, light-colored animal figures confronting the base of the shield-tree were identified by the royal women as *ahu djawa* 'foreign dogs.' This image, used also in ritual language, is a prestigious symbol of the local powers of the foreign rulers, its use stemming from the impression made by the dogs—so unlike the local animals—brought by early Dutch officers.

Abundance, leadership and foreign prestige are prominent concerns in Sumbā culture, but on no occasion were these abstract categories mentioned as the basis for ordering designs. Nevertheless, within the cloths we see the motifs arranged in relationships—whether of contrast, complementarity, gradation or integration—which appear consistent with known beliefs and attitudes of the Sumbānese.

That the Sumbānese do respond to non-verbalized order-

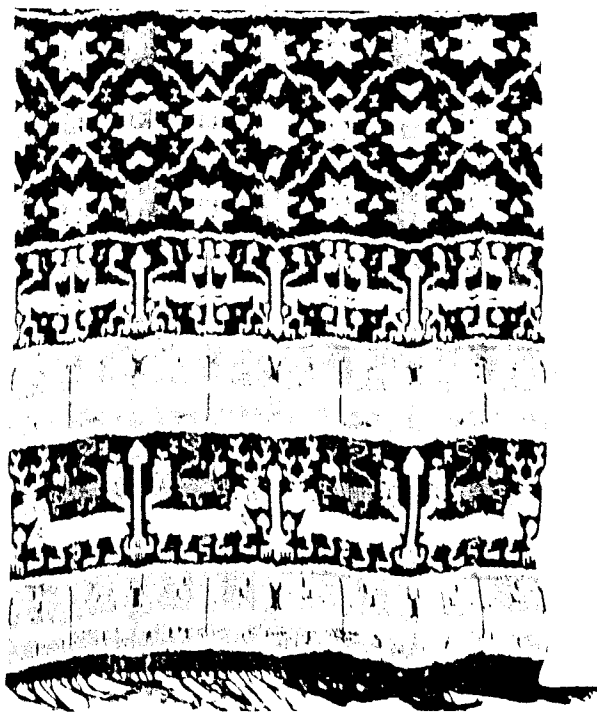


Fig. 11 Detail showing lower half of men's mantle plus full center band. Deer motif, warp ikat technique, East Sumba. Probably made in the export period of the '20s or '30s, this cloth shows less refinement in designs and composition than mantles made for local royalty. Nevertheless, colors and arrangement of figures are traditional. Width: 1.10 m; length: 2.61 m. T.M. 1962.26.15.

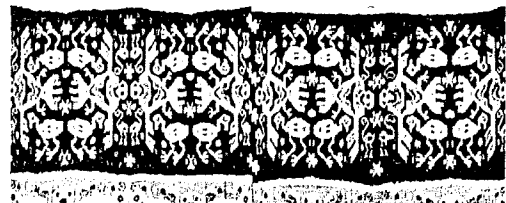


Fig. 12 Detail of centerfield, from men's mantle, East Sumba. In centerfield, figurative design of outstretched birds in pairs fits into a quadrangular shape. Width: 130 cm; len: 2.71 cm. Museum of Geography and Ethnology, Rotterdam, Cat. No. 19854 (1912).

ing principles can be shown in another aspect of the textiles, the arrangement of form. Close examination reveals subtle but constant compositional principles that are mentioned neither by the craftswomen nor by others. In discussions, craftswomen will say that the figures should be aligned in horizontal rows, that there should be balanced repetitions of the figures, that there should not be bald nor large, empty areas or that there should be filling motifs. No one states other equally constant principles. For instance, the use of slender, vertical shapes with innumerable vertical extensions leads the eye up and down and opposes the major horizontal forms. These refined vertical directions provide a counterbalance to the strong horizontal banding, thus

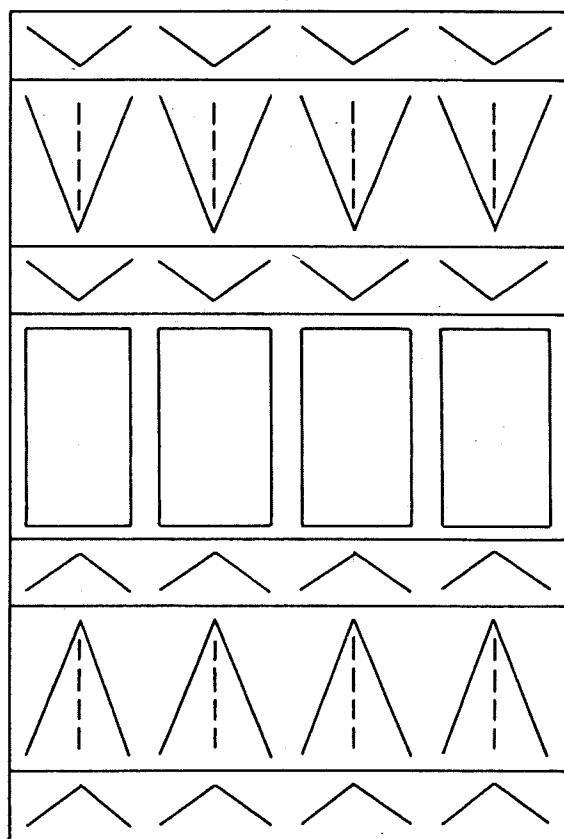


Fig. 13 Abstract summary of triangular and quadrangular shapes of typical compositions.

creating the visually effective composition of traditional cloths.

The unhappy results of ignoring this principle can be seen in many trade cloths of the '20s and '30s (Fig. 11). During that period when the Dutch encouraged production for export, the number of craftswomen in the port town area greatly expanded, and many of their products, hastily made, fail to meet the standards of workmanship set by the royal style.

There are further subtleties to the composition. The endfields and the centerfield are structured on different principles of form. In most endfield bands, design units are composed of three elements, or triangular forms predominate. This is obvious in the design unit of a pair of images confronting an object which in turn is given a triangular shape, as in the deer and plant of Fig. 4. Less obvious is that the overall configuration of the design units in the endfields is triangular in outline. The heads and tails of animals are frequently angled upward to form an invisible triangle around the design unit. Single large figures which are repeated (with only small or filling motifs in the interval) as the skull trees of Fig. 2, or which alternate with another large figure, as in the human and tree forms of Fig. 3, usually exhibit marked triadic or triangular form.

The centerfield characteristically contains designs ordered by a different principle. Here quadripartite or quadrangular form is the rule both for schematic and figurative elements. Most of the schematic designs consist of four elements or points of emphasis such as a core with four radiating elements (the floral pattern in Fig. 1 and the *patola ratu* in Fig. 2) or various lozenges, such as those in Fig. 2. The design unit itself can be enclosed within a hypothetical rectangle. Note in Fig. 2 how the small accents in the form of lozenges create four-part design units and mark the corners of quadrangles around them. Organic motifs, if used, are also arranged to fit a quadrangular shape, such as the paired, outstretched birds which appear in the centerfield band shown in Fig. 12. Centerfield designs, in other words, respond systematically to a different rule of form from the endfield designs. These differences of form are summarized abstractly in a diagram (Fig. 13).

Altogether the application of these various subtle principles—unique formulations of East Sumba artists—raise East Sumba cloths to the rank of the most complex composition in all Indonesian textiles.

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